DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 172 899 **JC 790 458**

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TITLE	The Cooling Out Function Reconsidered.
PUB DATE	[78]
NOTE	15p.
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Aspiration; Academic Education; *Academic Failure; College Bound Students; Community Colleges; Counseling Programs; Enrollment Trends; Failure Factors; *Guidance Counseling; *Guidance Objectives; *Junior Colleges; *Nontraditional Students; Postsecondary Education; Student Personnel Workers; Vocational Education; Withdrawal

ABSTRACT

"Cooling out" was identified in 1960 as a specific function of the community college in redirecting students who experienced academic failure. The "soft" cooling out process, which re-directs students into less demanding curricula or out of the college through counseling and advising rather than academic discipline, will increasingly become a reality in the four-year college and university as patterns of student attendance change. There are indications that many recent high school graduates who previously would not have attended college or would have attended a two-year institution are now entering four-year schools, and these students bring new goals, needs, and requirements. If patterns of student attendance change as suggested, three areas need to be reconsidered. First, each institution needs to consider the cooling out function and its appropriateness to the college's mission. Second, student personnel staff must be trained in academic advising and career guidance to strengthen the work done in these areas by faculty. Third, there must be options within the college curriculum to serve a diverse student body. Consideration must be given to alternatives to the traditional academic and liberal arts curricula to make remedial, professional, and career education more available, even within the four-year colleges and universities. (Author/DB)

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THE COOLING OUT FUNCTION RECONSIDERED

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ABSTRACT

"Cooling out" was identified in 1960 as a specific function of the community college in redirecting students who experienced academic failure. Arguments are presented to suggest a new clientele for community colleges for whom cooling out is less appropriate. Four year colleges and universities, however, are also experiencing a new clientele shift. Increasingly, cooling out may become a function of the four year college and university. Patterns of cooling out are discussed and implications are identified for student personnel workers and for curriculum.

THE COOLING OUT FUNCTION RECONSIDERED

"Cooling out the mark" is not only characteristic of confidence games in which the mark or victim is provided with a rationale for accepting his failure but also is characteristic of the operation of complex social organizations (Goffman, 1952). Burton Clark introduced the term into the literature of higher education in 1960. Clark suggested that there were two possible alternatives to handling the "latent terminal" student who brought inappropriate abilities or aspirations to an institution of higher education. The "hard" technique, usually employed by four year colleges and universities, used academic probation and suspension as mechanisms to remove the student from the institution. The "soft" technique, characteristic of the two year colleges in their efforts to "cool out" the student, involved either redirecting the student into less demanding curriculum areas or counseling the student out of the college. This total cooling out process was seen as a covert but legitimate function of the two year college; it has not been legitimatized for the four year institution. Recent shifts in student attendance patterns at institutions of higher education have, however, necessitated a reconsideration of the form and focus of the cooling out process. Such reconsideration has significant implications for student personnel service personnel and for curriculum planning in two and four year institutions.

Changing Attendance Patterns in Two-Year Colleges

Burton Clark identified and legitimatized the cooling out function of the two year college based on his observations of a California community college in the late 1950's (Clark, 1960). Since that time there have been enormous changes in the composition of typical community colleges' student body and a concurrent broadening and diversifying of community

colleges' goals and curriculum. These changes, but particularly the change in student attendance patterns at two year institutions, provide the impetus and necessity for reconsidering the cooling out function in the two year college. When Clark identified the cooling out phenomena in the late 1950's, as many as 70% of the students attending a community college came directly from the current high school graduating class; by 1975 major statewide systems reported less than 40% of community college enrollees were current high school graduates (Virginia, 1975, p. 10), and there is evidence that large urban institutions receive even lower proportions of current high school graduates. During the 1960's community college personnel projected continued growth based upon increasing enrollments of low socio-economic class and minority group students. Although growth occurred, these projections have not been fulfilled. The most recent longitudinal data concerning recent high school graduates indicate that community colleges have still not achieved major enrollments with low socio-economic groups, and that black students are going to four year colleges in equal or greater proportions to their enrollment in two year institutions. Community colleges are attracting a substantial proportion of the hispanic college-going population, but this is not a large college attendance group (Peng, 1977a; Tabler, 1976).

Community colleges have represented the most substantial growth segment of higher education through the 1960's and 1970's. This growth has not occurred through major changes in the attendance patterns of recent high school graduates. Rather, this growth can be attributed to the burgeoning numbers of older and primarily part-time students attending their local community college. Bishop and Van Dyke (1977) report that in representative urban areas "seventy-three percent of 25 to 34 year

old students in the first two years of college attend two year institutions" (p. 47). Increasingly, community colleges have become identified with the non-residential student and the adult and frequently part-time student.

Cooling Out--Community College Style

"Soft" cooling out as traditionally practiced in community colleges has both an informal and a formal component. The informal component is the interaction of students and faculty through which students learn faculty/staff attitudes about appropriate career patterns. This process is based upon in and out of class faculty-student and counselor-student interaction--an interaction uniquely characteristic of community colleges (Wilson and Gaff, 1975). The informal cooling out process is supported by peer interactions among students attempting various curriculum areas. There is a more formal cooling out process. This occurs through counselors and faculty performing formal roles as advisors on learning difficulties, academic aspirations, and career goals. Since community colleges are non-residential in nature, these discussions usually revolve around classroom activities and classroom exposures. Community college counseling staffs are usually particularly attuned to academic counseling/advising and to the nuances of personal adjustment associated with this pattern of advisement. It is in this context that a great deal of redirection and goal revision occur within the community college. In many institutions this is also associated with the developmental education program which attempts to upgrade basic academic skills while at the same time attending to realistic goal-setting and career choices for the academic non-achiever.

While both the informal and formal cooling out processes occur within the community college, they do not occur equally for the two

categories of students identified. The recent high school graduate tends to be a full-time and day-time student. This student will be influenced by the informal process because of the substantial amounts of time spent in the college environment and because of a collegiate peer group. The formal process also operates on these students. There is evidence that recent high school graduates who withdrew from community colleges are more satisfied with the counseling services provided than are those who withdrew from four year institutions (Fetters, 1977). Thus, it would appear that the cooling out function is an effective and positively perceived function of the community college for recent high school graduates.

The adult student, however, is not involved in the informal or formal cooling out process as extensively as the recent high school graduate. The adult student tends to see the community college as one of several priorities within a normal working life. They are less likely to spend much non-class time on campus. While the adult student can use in-class time to check out the appropriateness of his/her aspirations, the absence of out-of-class interactions limits the effect of the informal cooling out process. These adult students are even less affected by the formal cooling out process. In the evening programs there tend to be fewer opportunities to interact with counselors. The proportion of part-time instructors is much greater in the evening programs, and there is, therefore, less likelihood of interaction with full-time faculty members who understand the cooling out function, know the college curriculum and other opportunities in the community, and have the time, experience and willingness to deal with personal and academic counseling.

There is strong evidence to suggest that community colleges perform the cooling out function effectively for some parts of their clientele.

Respectable levels of satisfaction with the counseling function were cited earlier (Fetters, 1977). Redirection within the college curriculum seems also to work as retention of recent high school graduates in college has steadily improved. Trent and Medsker (1968) reported a 65% attrition rate four years after entrance for students entering community college in the fall of 1959. For students entering in the fall of 1966, Astin (1972) reported a 39% attrition rate. Additional trace evidence of an effective cooling out function exists in the two or three program shifts typical of a community college student over a two year period. This data indicates that cooling out as a process of redirection within the curriculum of the community colleges does occur while those students who do withdraw for either academic or non-academic reasons report general satisfaction with the counseling process. This indicates involvement in cooling out as a process of goal revision. There is very little data available on the impact of the cooling out function upon adult learners in the community college. Adult learners' goals, attendance patterns, and socialization needs do not fit the traditional college student models. This has made it difficult for institutions to gather appropriate data. And since college attendance is only one aspect of complex adult life patterns, it is very difficult to know what factors in an adult's life influenced decisions about college attendance, goal shifts, and program or curriculum changes.

Role of Cooling Out in Two-Year Colleges

Many writers on the community college movement view the "soft" cooling out process as a positive function (Blocker, et. al., 1965; Bushnell, 1973; Monroe, 1977). Cooling out is seen as a process involving academic and counseling experiences that assist students in making positive academic, career, and personal choices. A second

positive aspect of the cooling out process is identified by Rudolph (1977) where he describes the college experience as a transition point in the life of the individual as opposed to the pre-1955 notion of college as the confirmation of place in an elite group. This interpretation of the cooling out process would seem particularly appropriate for the adult student who comes to the college to try out his potential or to improve his skills for advancement or for a career shift. The community college cooling out function operates effectively for the recent high school graduate; the process may be less effective for the adult student and perhaps less appropriate. And, of course, there are people who argue the cooling out function is seldom appropriate (Karabel, 1972; Zwerling, 1976).

Future Attendance Patterns for Four-Year Colleges and Universities

The cooling out function has not been a generally acknowledged or accepted function in four year colleges and universities. Typically, the "hard" approach of academic probation and suspension has been used to deal with the student whose academic abilities or aspirations are not appropriate. These responses have acted to protect most institutions from student populations whose abilities and aspirations were inappropriate for the academic expectations or the curriculum. However, four year colleges and universities will face severe enrollment pressure over the next decade. Four year colleges and universities compete very successfully with two year colleges for the recent high school graduate; however, the numbers of these recent graduates are currently stable and shortly will be declining drastically. Since four year colleges and universities draw the vast majority of their undergraduates from this population, undergraduate enrollment will fall. Adult learners have been attracted

by the convenience and low cost of the non-traditional community colleges and do not appear to be a likely clientele for the undergraduate four year college. Thus, four year colleges need to develop new student clienteles and new institutional responses to these clients.

There have been some dramatic changes in the makeup of those recent high school graduates who attend four year colleges. More and more institutions are operating with open door or virtually open door admissions policies. This has brought increasing numbers of lower ability students into four year colleges and universities. Four year colleges have always attracted the largest population of students in the upper socio-economic categories; they are now competing very successfully with the community colleges for students in the mid-range socio-economic categories. This increasing proportion of middle class students brings a different orientation and value pattern to many colleges. Another recent development is the emerging preference of black high school graduates of all ability levels and socio-economic backgrounds for the four year college as opposed to the two year college (Peng, 1977a). Thus, as four year colleges and universities operate with increasingly open doors and attract greater proportions of the sons and daughters of the working class families and greater proportions of black students, they can anticipate many of the academic and social problems experienced by students in the community and junior colleges during the 1950's and 1960's.

The "soft" cooling out process, then, may become increasingly important for the four year college and university as it attempts to deal with a changing student clientele. The residential college setting itself provides a major advantage in dealing with students (Astin, 1977; Chickering, 197). Many of the advantages of the residential college

are attributed to the operation of informal interaction processes brought about by the residential experience. Non-academic counseling, interaction with faculty and student service staff, and especially peer involvement within and without the classroom have a positive effect upon a student's ability to find appropriate career patterns and academic direction. This informal process is clearly given more opportunity within the residential setting. However, most four year colleges have two severe limitations on this informal cooling out process. First, most residential college student personnel staffs are trained primarily for non-academic counseling and on-campus support activities. They are less likely to be trained or experienced in academic or career advisement, areas usually reserved for the teaching faculty. And this represents a limit on the ability of the student personnel staff to respond to the needs of new client groups. A second major limitation is the curriculum. Where the community college typically has academic, technical, remedial, and applied curriculum areas among which students may be directed, most four year colleges have a broader academic curriculum but have very limited technical, remedial or applied curricula. This makes redirecting within the curriculum difficult or impossible.

Cooling Out--University Style

There is evidence to suggest that the "soft" cooling out process does exist in four year colleges and universities despite its generally unacknowledged role. Retention rates in four year colleges have improved significantly; this may be taken as an indication of improved admissions screening or of improved redirection and advising. Trent and Medsker (1968) report a 39% attrition rate for students entering in the fall of 1959 while Astin (1972) reports a 28% attrition rate for students entering

in 1966. This pattern is confirmed through Fetters (1977) and his report of a 24% attrition rate for those entering colleges in 1972. A clear pattern of transfer among four year colleges exists as well as a strong pattern of transfer from four to two year institutions within the first year of college attendance (N.C.E.S., 1977). Redirection within the college curriculum and among colleges exists, and to that extent a "soft" cooling out process already exists in four year colleges and universities.

Conclusion

This article has contended that the "soft" cooling out process traditionally ascribed to the community college will increasingly become a reality in the four year college and university. Further, there are indications that many recent high school graduates who previously would have not attended college or would have been expected to attend a two-year college are now entering the four year college and university. This appears to be a reflection of more liberal admissions policies at many colleges and universities and of changing aspirations on the part of many students (Stafford, 1976). These changing patterns of college attendance will particularly impact less selective public four year colleges and regional universities. If patterns of student attendance change as suggested, three areas need to be reconsidered. First, each institution needs to consider the cooling out function and its appropriateness as a positive and legimitate function of that institution. Conscious choices should be made regarding the application of the "soft" or "hard" approach to the cooling out function and then appropriate information and training must be provided for the faculty and student personnel workers involved. Second, the orientation of the student personnel services personnel must

be reconsidered. In most residential colleges these people do not have major responsibilities for academic or career advising. If a "soft" cooling out process is to operate effectively in an institution, it is imperative that the student personnel staffs be trained in academic advising and in career guidance so that they may contribute a professional backup to the academic advisement done by the faculty and the informal advising done by student peers. Third, the college curriculum must be reconsidered. If the "soft" cooling out process is to operate appropriately, there must be options within the college curriculum to serve a diverse student body. Consideration must be given to alternatives to the traditional academic and liberal arts curricula such that remedial and professional patterns will be available to students who do not have strong academic aspirations. For example, if a strong engineering program exists, then alternative patterns in engineering technology, industrial arts, and vocational education would be appropriate curriculum patterns.

Community colleges historically have accepted the cooling out function. However, some reconsideration appears appropriate for them also. The recent high school graduate continues to be a candidate for the cooling out process as identified by Burton Clark in 1960. However, the increasingly dominant adult student does not appear well served by the cooling out process. These students are generally employed, mature, and independent; they are often parents, homeowners, and heads of households. They are less likely to be affected by the informal cooling out processes because they are only on campus for classes. And formal patterns set up by the institution are often seen as inappropriate or irrelevant in the context of a full adult life. The cooling out function in substance and in form must be reconsidered for the adult learner in the community college.

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